

THE
JUDGMENT
AND
ADVICE
OF THE
ASSEMBLY
OF THE
Associated Ministers
OF
WORCESTER-SHIRE.

Held at WORCESTER Aug. 6th 1658.

Concerning the Endeavours of Ecclesiastical Peace, and the Ways and Means of Christian Unity, which M^r John Durey doth present; sent unto him in the Name, and by the appointment of the aforesaid Assembly.

By Richard Baxter Pastor of the Church at Kederminster.

L O N D O N.

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THE
J U D G E M E N T
A N D
A D V I C E
Of the Assembly of the Associated
MINISTERS of Worcester. Shire.

Our DEAR and Reverend BROTHER,



Upon the receipt of your Papers and Consideration of the Subject, as our hearts were moved with thankfulness to God, that hath given you so great a desire after the peace of the Churches, and so much patience in the Labours and Travels of so many Years, for the obtaining of it; so we must needs resent it as a thing that should Melt our Hearts within us, that ever there should need so much adoe, and that among Christians, yea the Leaders of Christs Flock, to bring them to so clear and great a Duty. Much more than after all such Labours, there is no more done.

For our selves, as far as we can understand your desires, we conceive that it is in three Particulars; that our return must answer theirs. First, In giving you our thoughts of the designe in general. Secondly, In telling you our thoughts of the disease and cure more particularly. And Lastly, In offering you our correspondence for the time to come, for the contributing our utmost assistance to the work.

X. And for the First, There's little needfull to be said. The designe doth evidently bear the name of the Prince of Peace, and answer the Precepts of his Gospel, and the Workings of his Spirit in all his Saints, and is so happily suited to his interest and to the welfare of his Church, that it pleads sufficiently for itself, and needeth not the Testimony of such as we. So blessed a thing is Peace, and a Holy Peace among the Members of the Body of Christ, that the Enemies and Violators of it do pretend to it, and none are found that oppose it professedly for itself; they all flatter it while they fight against it, and betray it with a kiss, and smile upon it while they are wounding of it, and extoll it with the highest praises.

while they destroy it; condemning themselves by all that they say in its justification: we scarce think that there is a man of all those, where your great unwearied Labour have least succeeded, and that are obstinately unpeaceable after all; but will joyn with you in extolling the Concord of the Churches, and profess their great desires after it, so that they are all fain from their several pretensions to trust to fetch their weapons for the wounding of our Peace. For Christ hath left it an undeniable principle, that all his Members are one Body, into which by one Spirit we are all Baptized, in which even the more feeble and less comely and less honourable parts have their place, receiving a comeliness and honour from the whole, that there may be no Schisme in the Body, but the Members should have the same care one for another, suffering with that which suffereth, and rejoicing with that which is honoured, *1 Cor. 12. 12, 13, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26.* And the Holy Ghost hath left it as a certain truth, that of all these Members the most Charitable is the best, *1 Cor. 12. 31. & 13. 13.* And that all men must know us to be Christs Disciples by our loving one another, *Joh. 13. 35. & 15. 17.* That we must thus be followers of God as Deare Children, and walk in love as Christ hath loved us, *Eph. 5. 1, 2.* And mainly he that loveth God, doth love his Brother also, *1 Joh. 4. 21.* and he is a liar if he say he loveth God, when he hateth his Brother, *Verst. 20.* Peace must be followed (and not only accepted of when offered) as well as holiness, *Heb. 12. 14.* And that with all men if it be possible, and as much as lieth in us, *Rom. 12. 18. 1 Thes. 5. 13.* The weak in Faith must be received, but not to doubtfull Disputations, *Rom. 14. 1.* And the strong must tolerate their infirmities, nor pleasing themselves, but their neighbours for their Edification, *Rom. 15. 1, 21.* The light of a multitude of such passages of Scripture doth shine so bright in the faces of the unpeaceable, that they were not able to stand before them, if they drew not the veyle of a zeal for some pretended truth over the face of their most uncharitable Practices. But the self-appropriated Title of *Orthodox*, and the straining of *Heterodox* odious consequents, from their Brethrens words, will prove but insufficient Fig-leaves to cover the nakedness of uncharitable dividers: when the Lord of Peace shall search and judge them. Go on deare Brother; and if Satan should have leave to hinder your success, yet live and dye in this Blessed work; and if you have not more comfort at last, in the revenue of these your pacificatory labours, then self-conceited dividers shall have in their uncharitable waies; then must we confess that we were strangers to the will and wales of Christ. The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easie to be intreated: and the fruit of Righteousness is by Peace-makers sown in Peace: but the wisdom that cherisheth envying and strife descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensuall, (or naturall) and devilish: For where envying and strife is, (though piety and Orthodox Doctrine may be pretended) yet there is confusion (or tumultuousness) and every evill work; and therefore in pretending to befriend the truth, they do but glory in vain and lye against the truth, and indeed know not what Spirit they are of, *Jam. 3. 17, 18. & 16. 13, 14.*

XX. And for the second Point, The healing of our wounds! Oh that we could as surely accomplish it, as we can all tell what means are necessary thereunto. Our work is not to procure a Communion between the visible Members of Christ and of Satan, nor a Syncretisme with any that hold not all that is essentiall to Christianity, or that deny any point of absolute necessity to Salvation; nor yet to draw any to participate with the truest Church or Saint in any of their Sins: Nor yet is it our present business to change mens minds from Infidelity or He-

resist to the Faith, that so they may be capable of our Communion; nor to change the differing Opinions of the Churches, which is a thing that we cannot expect at present: But our work is in these three particulars. First, To bring the true Churches of Christ to understand each other to be true Churches. Secondly, To procure that internall Charity which true Christians should have to one another. Thirdly, To procure that externall manifestation of this Charity, which is their duty, or so much at least as is necessary to our common safety, and the Propagation of that truth which all profess. And for the first of these (which the rest depend upon) What can we require more of one another, then a Profession of the Christian Faith; That which we require to prove a single person fit to be a Member of the Church, is it that we must require of whole Churches, and with which we must be satisfied; which can be nothing but a profession of Christianity, not nullified by contradictory professions or practices. And I hope we are before this agreed what Christianity is; and what are the Essentials of the Faith. All these Essentials we do all profess. We all profess to believe the Articles of Faith contained in the Creeds and Confessions of the Churches, by what Test soever a Christian or a Church was known for many hundred Years after Christ, (till Papists and Hereticks enlarged or depraved the Creeds,) by the same do we all offer our selves to be tryed, and may easily be known to be professed Christians, and (being united with our Pastors for holy Communion,) to be true Churches of Christ. We all take the holy Scriptures for the Rule of our Faith and Lives, and believe it to be the infallible Word of God. In this Scripture all the Essentials of Christianity, (and the Integrals too,) are plainly expressed. This rule is Divine, and so our Faith is Divine. Had we but a humane Rule, we could have but a humane Faith; If any would know our Religion, it is hither that we send them. Our Confessions are but to satisfy men, of our understanding the sense of passages of Scripture: And they are written according to the Occasions of their writing, and therefore with Diversity (though not contrariety in any necessary point, at least) speaking most to the Points that contentions call us to speak most to; we make none of our Confessions the Rule of our Faith. Nor do we take any thing in them to be infallible and unalterable, further then it agreeth with the Scripture, which is our Rule. It hath been the running design of the Papists (*Ut in conventu Thoruni & sapissime*) to draw us to own some other Test of our Religion: and then they think they may freely dispute against it, and charge it with falsity, novelty, &c. which they dare not charge on the Word of God: And they think by this to set us altogether by the Ears, while one is for one Confession and others for another; Whereas in the Scripture we are United.

The great cause of our uncharitable censures and divisions, hath been our departing from the Ancient simplicity of Faith, and also from the sufficiency of the holy Scriptures, to be the Rule and Test of our Faith: And till we return to this Scripture sufficiency, and ancient simplicity, there is no hope of the ancient Christian Unity and Charity, while proud men must thrust their own Opinions into the Churches Creed, or on-Church all that hold not such Opinions; our peace with them must be by calming them, and bringing them to themselves, and bearing as far as may be with their Infirmary, but not by doing as they do, in lacerating the Churches.

We know it is here objected by the Papists and too many more, that many Hereticks will subscribe to all that is in the Scriptures, while they misinterpret them, and what's the consequent.

[There is]

[Therefore a plainer Confession is necessary for men to own that will be accounted Orthodox.] We deny the consequence. The Scripture is a Rule both plain and perfect. A Heretic may misinterpret the words of any other Confession as well as the words of Scripture. The sense of the councill of *Trent* is not yet agreed on among the Papists. The remedy for Heresie is not to impose another Rule of Faith then Scripture, (as if this were insufficient and we could mend it) but to exercise Church Government carefully, and if any be proved to teach any Doctrine contrary to the Scripture, that Magistrates and that Pastors do their parts to correct such and restrain them. We might not make new Confessions or Laws when ever wicked men will misinterpret or violate the old Ones; the perfectest Law may be broken, and the perfectest confessions misinterpreted. We conclude therefore, that all that subscribe to the holy Scriptures, and particularly to all contained in the Antient Creeds of the Church, and in the Lords Prayer and Decalogue, do make so full a Profession of Christianity, that none may reject them, till they prove by some inconsistent contradiction that indeed they hold not what they do profess.

And yet we deny not, but to teach the People, to direct young Ministers, to stop the mouths of slanderous adversaries, the Confessions of the Churches are usefull and to be approved. And *ex abundanti* to cure the jealousies of diseased minde, we are all ready in every Protestant Church to give men a full account of our Faith, in plain Confessions: but with this Protestation, that only the holy Scripture is the Rule of our Faith, and the Test of our Religion, and that all that is contained in our severall Confessions is not Essentiall to a Christian or a Church; nor will we justify every Term or Method of these Confessions, as perfect and inculpable; but as we are certain in the Essentials and other points that are plain in Scripture, so for the lesser dark points, we are ready to alter any thing of them that can be proved contrary to the Scripture which is our Rule.

The 39 Articles were lately the Confession of our Churches here in England, but now because of too or three Articles for Ceremonies and Prelacy, this Confession is laid by; and not imposed upon any. And what! have we therefore changed our Religion, or are the Churches in England, other things and of another Faith. No such matter. Who will affirm it, that knows what Christianity is? We have the same Christ, and the same Rule of Faith and Test of our Religion still, and hold the same Doctrine which those Articles express, though we be not all of a mind in Ceremonies. A Papist, *Polydore Virgill*, truly saith of the Protestants, that they are therefore called, *Evangelici quod haud ullam a se verent recipiunt nisi esse Legem, qua ad animarum salutem pertinet, nisi quam Christus aut Apostoli dedissent.* De Invent. Rev. l. 8. c. 4. p. 410. By the great mercy of God we are all agreed in the authority and verity of the Scriptures, and that's enough in point of Profession, to prove us to be of a sound belief: but if we think to centre in any Confessions that are not plainly thence extracted, we attempt a difficult and needless work. Nothing therefore can be pretended against our Faith, (the rule being so perfect and unquestioned) unless it be that we nullifie this Profession by contradictions, and believe not the Scripture while we think we do believe it; but they that will condemn any Church on such an accusation, must first produce their prooffe, which must not be from the words of a single person, which none are responsible for but himself, but it must be the words of the Church it selfe, which they condemn, and it must not be from forced; feigned; or undiscerned consequences, while the Church doth expressly

assert those truths, which the Accusers pretend they do by consequence subvert. Such a connexion is there between Theologicall Verities, that if no man were a true believer that holdeth any thing consequentially inconsistent with an Article of Faith, it would be hard to find a believer in the world. Secondly, They must in reason admonish the accused Church, and hear them speak for themselves, and not reject them till after the first and second Admonition, ordinarily; But if all the enemies of the Protestant Churches at Rome, or Hell, should bring forth their evidence to prove them void of the Christian Belief: (for we are loath to suppose that there are any such accusers among themselves,) they would all shame themselves, and leave the Churches in possession of their Faith; we can as easily prove that we are Christians, as the Romanists can that they are Papists.

2. And for our second work (to procure mutuall Charity among the Churches,) This is the work of grace which we may and must perswade men to, and leave the blessing to the Lord. But we must needs say, that one of the greatest causes of our divisions, is the admitting of graceless un sanctified men into the Sacred Ministry; who being meer Opinionists in Religion, and void of that tender love to the Brethren, which is the Character of true Christians, are easily carried for the sake of their Opinions, to condemn and vilifie their Brethren, and tear and tread down the Churches of Christ: Whereas if they had ever known themselves, they would have been more compassionate to others; and would be so jealous of their frail understandings as to be afraid least they condemn themselves, by the terms on which they condemn their Brethren: And if ever they had been possessed of the Spirit of Christ, they would have been taught of God to love the Brethren: and withall they would have understood, that denying them to be Brethren, will prove a poor excuse for their uncharitableness.

And for the third point (of Externall manifestation of this charity) we conceive that in these severall waies, its to be done.

First, If persons of different Judgments in lesser Controversies, do live neare together in the same Towns or Countries; that they should lovingly joyn together in the same holy Assemblies for the worshipping of God.

Secondly, That if any professing the substance of Christianity; dare not joyn for fear of sin, in the use of any Ceremony or Doctrine which they are against, they should not thereupon be used uncharitably, but have such liberty as is consistent with the Peace and Welfare of the Churches and Commonwealth where they live.

Thirdly, That the Churches of severall Nations (that have not opportunity of locall Communion) do cheerfully acknowledg one another for the true Churches of Christ, and profess Christian love to one another, and a readines to assist each other to their power, in the common cause.

In some, Deare Brother, We conceive that the means most usefull for the expedition attaynement of these ends are these two. First, That the Churches in every Nation do in their Synods recognize their own Confessions, and also receive the Confessions of other Churches; and having considered of both, do send to those Churches, whose Communion and friendship they desire, a double message: that is, both an acknowledgment of the truth of those Churches, with a profession of our Brotherly love to them, &c. And also our desire of the like Brotherly Charity from them to us. To which end we send them the Confession of our Faith. In order to this it were to be desired, that our common Confessions,

essions, be in generall the holy Scriptures, and more particularly the Ancient Creeds of the Church; (if this satisfie not) a fuller collection of all, and only the Essentials; and neer adjoining points of Christianity, and that as much as may be, in the very words of Scripture: if this cannot be done for want of time, or concord, then let the present Confession of such Churches be sent as it is, but with this profession, that only the Word of God is our Rule, and if any thing in our Confession be found disagreeable to that rule, we are ready when we understand so much, to disown it and correct it. If you get but the Churches thus to own each other, and profess their Brotherly love and concord, your work is done: some such acknowledgment we should all subscribe. *A.G. We the Servants of Jesus Christ, representing the Churches of Christ in England, in our Assembly at W. having considered of the Confession of the Churches of Christ in (E.G.) Saxanie, and heard of their stability in the Christian Faith, do heartily own them as the true Churches of Christ, and love them as our dear Brethren in the Lord, and take it for our duty to pray for them, and praise God on their behalf, and assist them in the common cause, according to our severall capacities and opportunities, and we earnestly desire the like Brotherly love and Communion from them, having sent them our Confession of Faith, and this profession of Brotherly love to that end.*

This much of the work is with one side Actually, or Virtually done already. For we perceive by the Papers you sent us, and by the frequent Professions of many Reformed Churches, that they are generally resolved to own the Churches called Lutherans; and for our parts we take it as a thing that Charity alloweth us not to question (though in every point we be not of their mindes) So that on one part the work is done already, and nothing is wanting but a solemn manifestation of it, and an invitation of them to the like Charity and Communion.

Secondly, The second part of the work to be done is, that those Churches which upon these Brotherly Invitations, shall reject any neighbour Churches, and refuse to own them as Brethren, in Communion, may be desired (as we must do with particular Members) to set down in terms, out of their Confessions the Heresie or other sin that they charge them with, as the cause of their rejection, and hear them speak for themselves, before they judge them; which if they refuse, we can proceed no further, but commit our cause to God, as we would do against the accusations of any unreasonable men. But if they performe it, we shall, it is like, correct some phrases that offend them, and explaine others, and give them satisfaction; which one would think none should need: when the question is not [*Whether we have any errors*] (for so have the accusers, and all men on earth) but, [*Whether we are true Christians, and Churches of Christ,*] which nothing but lamentable darkness, or growardness can cause Brethren to deny. The two chiefest expedients to satisfie, or silence all accusations would be

First, To reduce our Confessions as aforesaid, to Scripture and the Antient Creeds, and to Scripture phrase.

Secondly, And to cause some judicious moderate men to draw up a discourse containing our mutuall agreements, and contracting our differences, and explicating the mistaken points, and shewing how much of the difference is but seeming; how much but verball, and that the reall are but in lesser points, where a difference is tollerable and consistent with Christianity and holy Communion. Some of us think it no hard matter to manifest the disagreements that are most odiously exaggerated, to be farre smaller then many on both sides apprehend them. And much is done towards this already, by severall learned Pacificators whom you have excited.

XXX. Having

XXX. Having thus shew'd you our thoughts of our work in general, and in particular, what remains but that we return you our hearty thanks for your great labours and patience for the Churches sake, and for communicating your endeavours to us; who profess that our hearts are much upon this work, and if at any time you can inform us which way we may be any whit serviceable to the accomplishment of it, we shall very thankfully accept your insinuations, and devote our interests and abilities to so blessed a work. In the mean time it shall have our hearty desires and Prayers for Success; and so shall all the friends of Peace and You especially, whose Name is hereby made honourable in the Churches, and very honourable to

Your Brethren in the Faith and Patience of the Gospel

Subscribed in the Name, and by the Appointment of the Assembly of the Associated Ministers of Worcester-shire, held at Worcester, August, 6th 1658.

By us Richard Baxter, Pastor of the Church at Kederminster. John Burston, Pastor of the Church at Bewdly. Thomas Wright, Pastor of the Church at Harlebury. Giles Collyer, Pastor of the Church at Blackley. George Hopkins, Pastor of the Church at Evesham. Joseph Trebell, Pastor of the Church at Church-Lench.

Deare Brother.

THOUGH our particular Associations meet once a month, yet our general meeting being but once a quarter, I could no sooner dispatch an Answer to your Letters. Our Brethren are thankfull for your great Respect in Communicating of your Papers concerning so sweet and desirable a thing as the Concord of the Churches. I conceive the way that we have here expressed will be by the most expeditious, namely for the most peaceable Churches to begin and lead to the rest. First, A Confession of their Faith. (as much as may be in Scripture phrase, that it may make no quarrels,) And Secondly, With it such a Profession of Brotherhood and Communion, as in the Formula we have expressed; and this be accepted, that we desire a return of the like from them. When this is done, the work is done, (save only that the Recording this by their Synods, and Improving it by their Princes and Divines must help forth the fruits of it.) If they deny this, they must be desired to set down in their Accusation the Reasons on which they deny us their Communion: which when we have received, it may to one but we shall, partly by correcting our Expressions which offend, and partly by explaining them, and partly by manifesting their Mistakes, give some satisfaction. If this way will not do, I think no way will, but Princes correction of the temperate Divines. We may calmer thus satisfy them by Writings than by confused debates in great Assemblies, and You, or I may not hope to live to see an Assembly of all or most of the Churches for this Work. The Lord direct, strengthen and prosper you in this blessed work, I rest

August 18th
1658.

Your unworthy Brother

RICHARD BAXTER.

INSCRIPTION.

To my Reverend and much Honoured Brother Mr John Dury, Preacher of the Gospel in LONDON, this deliver.

F I N I S.